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Traditions of Men (Part 1)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg explores the traditions of men in Mark chapter 7, where the Pharisees and scribes questioned why Jesus' disciples did not follow the tradition of washing their hands before eating bread. Jesus responded by referencing prophecies in Isaiah and Hosea, stating that the people honor with their lips, but their hearts are far from God. Gregg argues that God values moral purity over ceremonial cleanness and the Old Testament washings had more symbolic value than a hygienic purpose. Jesus emphasized that issues of the heart matter to God and urged his followers to love God with their heart, soul, mind, and strength, rather than being bound by the commandments of men.

Transcript

Let's turn to Mark chapter 7 in the Life of Christ schedule that you have, that we gave out earlier in the year. It actually shows that we would be using Matthew 15 as our text today, but it shows Mark 7 as a parallel. As I was looking at these passages, again it seemed more logical to use Mark 7 than Matthew 15.

These two passages are very parallel to each other. There are, however, it seems to me, reasons that we ought to look at Mark's version and we will bring in, as is appropriate, details from Matthew. The material that we are scheduled to cover, we may not cover all of it because there's really two parts to it.

The first part that we're supposed to cover today has to do with the traditions of men and what Jesus had to say about them. It seems to me we could get quite occupied with this for the entire class time that we have. Then we have also a story about Jesus casting a demon out of a girl who is not present, but her mother comes to Jesus and she is a Gentile.

That makes it a different kind of situation than the other kinds of situations where Jesus has cast out demons. That is also on schedule for today, though I don't predict that we will get into it today. We may have to go and take a different session for that.

We'll see. Today, at least, we will talk about Jesus and the traditions of men. Let's look at Mark 7 and I'd like to read, well, I'm going to read the first 23 verses and then we'll talk

about each of them.

Then the Pharisees and some of the scribes came together to him, having come from Jerusalem. Now, when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands, they found fault. For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands in a special way, holding the tradition of the elders.

When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other things which they have received and hold, like the washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels and couches. Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands? He answered and said to them, well, did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites as it is written? This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.

And in vain they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men, the washing of pitchers and cups and many other such things you do. And he said to them, all too well, you reject the commandment of God that you may keep your tradition.

For Moses said, honor your father and your mother and he who curses father or mother, let him be put to death. But you say, if a man says to his father or mother, whatever profit you might have received from me as Corban, that is to say, dedicated to the temple or to God. And you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother, making the word of God of no effect through your tradition, which you have handed down and many such things you do.

And when he had called all the multitude to him, he said to them, hear me, everyone, and understand. There's nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him. But the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man.

If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear. And when he had entered a house away from the crowd, his disciples asked him concerning this parable. So he said to them, are you thus without understanding also? Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him because it does not enter his heart, but his stomach and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods.

And he said, what comes out of a man that defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of men proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride and foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man.

And I might add that Matthew 15, 20, the parallel to this adds at the very end, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man. Now, the passage is really one of the more relevant incidents in the life of Jesus for understanding the nature of righteousness, the

nature of one's relationship with God and what it is that the Lord doth require of thee. You might remember that in the Old Testament from time to time, the prophets addressed the issue of the ceremonial versus the moral issues and the relative importance of the two.

Hosea chapter six is a place where that is done. Malachi talks about those things. Micah talks about those things.

Of course, Micah 6, 8 is familiar to us where he says he has shown the old man what is good and what does the Lord require of thee. This is right after a question is posed in Micah 6 where the question is, how shall I come before the Lord? Shall I bring thousands of rams for a sacrifice? Shall I bring rivers of oil to pour out before the altar? I mean, what is it that God wants? And Micah says it's quite simple, really. He's showed you what he wants.

He wants you to do justice and love mercy and walk humbly with your God. Moral issues, issues of the heart and yet the rivers of oil and the thousands of rams and so forth, all of which have to do with the ceremonial worship of the temple. Those things were not the things that mattered to God.

David himself understood these things, too. In Isaiah 50, I mean, in Psalm 51, David said, if you had desired sacrifices and offerings, I would have brought them to you. This is after David had sinned with Bathsheba.

So I would have gladly brought them to you, but you have not desired those things. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit and a contrite heart. So there were people in the Old Testament, David and the prophets, who understood that God was not into ceremonial cleanness, but into moral purity.

Now, that is really largely the issue in this passage, although it also has to deal with something else here, and that is traditions of men. The traditions in question had to do with ceremonial purity, but there are two separate issues, but they are related to each other. What is at issue here is man's idea of religion, which is always externalism.

Religion, by nature, is externalistic. It has to do with cleaning up your act. To the Jews, this was symbolically portrayed by cleaning the outside of their bodies.

We have talked about this before. We have occasion to talk about it much more in depth right now because of this story. The Jews, as Mark tells us, had a custom of doing a great number of washings.

These washings of the Jews are sometimes referred to in Scripture as ablutions, A-B-L-U-T-I-O-N-S. Ablutions are simply ritual washings of the body or of the hands or of something. Washing cups and vessels and couches and so forth are also included in this, according to Mark.

Of course, that is also known from the Talmud, which records the customs of the Jews at this time and at a later date as well. Now, these washings that the Jews did were not relevant to hygiene. They had nothing to do with getting the dirt off of your hands so that you might not get sick when you eat your food.

If we were transported in a time machine back to those times, or even by a modern jet to a third world country, we would probably find similar conditions that after you'd walked around in the marketplace, you'd feel like washing your hands before you ate. Because by our standards of hygiene, we understand that there's a lot of microbes and bacteria and germs that in physically unclean situations, if they go into your mouth, they can make you sick. So we are accustomed to washing, and we don't maybe wash it.

Some people do in this culture wash all the time. They're nuts about germs, but we may not even be as careful about washing in our society where things are fairly clean, where the roads are paved and there aren't people defecating and urinating at the side of the road and things like that. But if you go to a third world country, you will find many times just being outside makes you feel a little defiled.

And you don't, at least depending on your degree of sensitivity to it, you might want to, you wouldn't feel comfortable eating without washing your hands had you a chance to do so. This, however, is for an entirely different motivation than what the Jews had. The Jews knew nothing about microbes and germs.

They had not been discovered yet. They didn't know that eating with dirty hands could make one sick. Now, you might think that after a thousand years of human history, this would have been figured out.

But we now know that it wasn't until the time of Pasteur, only a couple of centuries ago, that modern science discovered that there was some relationship between physical uncleanness and sickness, that germs cause sickness. It's amazing that it took mankind so long to learn this. However, in the Law of Moses, there were many laws that actually anticipated this fact.

And this is one of the things that sort of inclines to confirm the inspiration of Scripture. This doesn't prove the Scripture to be inspired, but it is remarkable how that long before human scientists discovered that certain physically unclean situations can promote sickness, there were laws built into the ancient code of the Jews which, if followed, would help to prevent some infections. Persons who had internal bleeding were to be separated from society until the condition was lifted.

The laws about keeping lepers separate from society are the earliest known laws in history of any society of quarantine. Of course, at a later time in history, it became quite obvious that you must quarantine people who are infectious. That would put them away from people who are well, so they don't get infectious.

It's only in our ultra-modern times that society has forgotten this, with AIDS. And we don't even let people know when someone has AIDS, because it's politically incorrect to identify them. And so in any hospital today, you might go into any ward, and unbeknownst to you, there are AIDS patients there, because there are no AIDS wards, because that would violate the privacy of the AIDS patients.

That would let people know they have AIDS. So in any place in the hospital you go, you may have an AIDS person sharing the bed next to you, but you would not be allowed to know that. So only in our modern times have we rejected common sense about quarantining people with infectious diseases, and that for political reasons, not because our education has failed us.

But in ancient times, to quarantine an infectious ill person was not known to be necessary to avoid infection. But the laws that God gave the Jews required this. And many, many times, the ceremonial laws of Israel reflect what would appear to be God's knowledge of the nature of sickness and its spread.

Now, part of those ceremonial laws did have to do with washing, washing the body in certain situations. If you had an issue of blood, if you had come in contact with a dead body, or a number of any other things that could be defiling situations, this was a ceremonial thing. It had nothing to do, as far as the Jews knew, with germs or anything like that.

And probably that wasn't the principal concern with God either. But if you had contracted ceremonial defilement, there would be a period of time, generally it was until sundown in the case of some kinds of defilement, or a full week in other cases, or until the end of the condition. If it was something like leprosy or an ongoing internal bleeding or issue of semen or something like that, that was kind of irregular for the duration of the condition, that person would have to be separated from society.

But at the end of the period of uncleanness, before reentering society, it would be necessary, as you know from reading Leviticus and the other laws, for that person to wash his body and wash his clothing before he reentered society. Now, they didn't know why. To them it was all symbolic, and no doubt there was something symbolic to it, but we can see very reasonable cause for this too, because many of those things that would cause a person to be unclean were caused by situations that would be hygienically dangerous to readmit somebody into society without first washing them up to remove the residue of infection.

Now, I believe that the ceremonial washings in the Old Testament were mostly for symbolic value, but we can see, of course, good common sense in terms of modern hygienic knowledge involved in God's giving those laws. Now, the laws of washing were principally to depict certain spiritual truths. We've talked about this before, so I won't go into detail, but let me simply remind you that I understand the ceremonial defilement of

Old Testament law to be a type of sin.

Leprosy is a good example of this. A person who is a leper was not sinful for being a leper. It did not, in fact, interrupt their heart fellowship with God.

A very godly person could have leprosy, and if they died with leprosy, they could still be saved. But their condition of leprosy outwardly was a symbolic type of sin, and what leprosy did to a person outwardly and socially is what sin does to a person spiritually. The leper had to be excluded from the fellowship of God in the temple or the tabernacle.

The leper had to be isolated from his family and friends and from society in general. The leper had to acknowledge himself to be unclean and unfit for contact with others. And, of course, after a leper was cured, if they ever had the advantage of being, there was a ceremony of sacrifice and washing and so forth that they had to undergo.

Now, all of these things have their spiritual analogy in sin. A person who is a sinner must acknowledge himself to be unclean, must acknowledge himself to be sinful. They must recognize that it does break relationships.

Sin breaks relationships between God and with man. But also, in order to be clean of sin, there needs to be a washing. Now, it doesn't have to be a physical washing of water, but it must be a washing of the conscience.

And the New Testament, especially in the book of Hebrews, talks about this from time to time. So does 1 John, that we are washed by the blood of Christ. The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin, it says in 1 John 1.7. Now, having said that, we realize that there was a value symbolically in the washing of persons who had been defiled ceremonially.

It conveyed the notion that a person who is sinful needs to be cleansed of sin. He's dirty, spiritually dirty, morally dirty. But the condition that was symbolic of that in the Old Testament, some defilement, was not necessarily a case of moral dirtiness or something that would really interrupt a person's relationship with God.

I mean, if they couldn't go to the tabernacle, that doesn't mean they couldn't go to heaven. But all of that outward ritual was to depict these spiritual truths. Now, the rabbis felt that a great number of things might defile a person besides the things that Moses had delineated.

Contact with a Gentile, for example. To the rabbis, they felt like Gentiles were unclean. It's like touching a dead body.

If you touched a Gentile, then you were made unclean. And eventually, the traditions of the rabbis became so extreme on this that they felt that by walking on the ground of Gentile territory would make one unclean. Or even breathing air that had blown over

Gentile territory before entering Palestine would make you unclean.

In other words, everything would make you unclean. You couldn't live without being made unclean. In fact, they felt that they should be washed not only from actual cases of defilement identified in the scripture, but from even possible cases of defilement.

If a person did not stay indoors all day long and ventured out at all into a public place, it was necessary for them to do a ceremonial washing as they came in from the house because of the possibility that unbeknown to them, they might have contracted defilement through maybe touching a Gentile or breathing air that had blown over Gentile territory or whatever. All of this, of course, took the ideas of ceremonial defilement to a ridiculous extreme, but that's not unusual for the rabbis. I mean, they wanted to build a hedge around the law.

Initially, this was a pure desire on their part, I think, is my impression. In fact, Ezra, who is a very godly rabbi and scribe back in post-exilic times, seems to be one of the guys who was instrumental in starting this tradition. But while the Jews were in Babylon and away from their temple back in 586 B.C. when the temple was destroyed and they were taken into Babylon, there was concern on the part of the Jewish leaders that the people separated from their holy land and from the temple worship might simply abandon Jewish practices altogether and that Judaism might cease to exist as a distinctive religion.

And therefore, in the absence of a temple in which to worship and therefore the inability to actually keep the law of Leviticus, which required temple sacrifices, they came up with what they considered to be the important issues of the law that could be kept in a foreign land. And they even wanted to make sure that people kept them so meticulously that they did what the rabbis called building a hedge around the law. Where the law was not specific about certain things, the rabbis became very specific.

We've talked especially in the past about Sabbath keeping. The law is not specific as to what constitutes a breach of Sabbath. In the law it just says don't do any labor, don't bear any burdens.

But what constitutes a burden? Lifting yourself out of bed might be bearing a burden. And, you know, putting on your clothes might be constituted labor. So the rabbis, where the Bible had not been specific, decided to elaborate and actually make rules that would clarify that.

And they would make them, if anything, a little stricter than necessary so that they might put a hedge around the law. That is, just to make sure. Since no one was really quite sure what might be a breach of Sabbath, they'd make it as strict as possible so that if people would keep that, they'd have a buffer zone between where they were and where violation was probably going to be.

In other words, by human devices, they added restrictions and regulations that God had never added. Now, as I said, I have no doubt that this was well-intentioned initially. They did this with the Sabbath.

They did this with grounds for divorce. They did this with fasting. They made days of fasting, which the Bible never ordained.

They did this with cases of defilement and washing. Eventually, it got to a place where not only did they have to wash themselves in all the circumstances that the Bible or the Old Testament said they should, but they had to wash themselves in every situation. They couldn't eat without washing.

And it had nothing to do with any concept of health. It had to do with being right with God. And you know that in addition to adding all these traditions of men, the Jews had no awareness, for the most part, and we can judge this from the fact that the prophets had to repeat it so often to them.

They had no concept of the fact that these rituals were not really the thing that separated a man from God or introduced a man to God. The festivals and the dietary laws and the laws of cleanness and the sacrificial system, these things were in fact part of the law, but they were not really the issue with God. The real issues with God were things like justice and mercy and faithfulness.

But we can't really, I suppose, blame the Jews more than others for their ignorance in this matter because all religious people make the same mistake, including many persons who are in Christian traditions. The Christian churches make similar rules, traditional ideas, or even when things are not strictly man-made traditions, even things like baptism or taking communion, or in some traditions, or quite a number of other things as well, the way you dress when you go to church in some places matters to people, the kind of building you're in, the kind of person administering the sacraments or whatever. All these things, of course, some of them are biblical, some of them are not biblical, but the ones that are biblical and the ones that are not, all of them alike, have to do with ceremony and none of them have to do with true righteousness.

And so in this passage, Jesus deals first of all with the traditional ideas, but then before he's done, he goes and talks about not just the traditional things, but even the things that God had ordained at one time that were ceremonial. He starts out blaming the Pharisees for making the traditions of their fathers more important than what God had commanded. And he goes on before he's done and basically says the ceremonial things don't matter anyway.

Even the ones that God did command, they never were the issue with God and they certainly were going to cease to be with Jesus. Now, Mark is writing apparently to Gentiles. It is told us by Papias, an early church father from the early 2nd century, that

Mark's gospel was really the result of Mark's writing down and interpreting what Peter had preached.

Papias says that Mark was Peter's interpreter. I'm not sure to what degree interpreting went on, but this is what we're told and most scholars feel, and I think they're probably justified in doing so, that Papias is a good source on this. And therefore, almost all Christians, evangelical or otherwise, believe that Mark's gospel is in fact Peter's gospel written down by Mark.

And that being so, it's rather interesting because when we find later on in the book of Acts, that Peter was on a housetop in Joppa and a sheet was lowered from heaven in a vision containing unclean animals, that Peter was resistant to the command to eat them, but he eventually understood that it was okay to do so. And Jesus said to him three times there, what I have cleansed, don't you call unclean or common. And of course, the message to Peter there was not really so much about foods as about people, because he was now being called to go into the house of a Gentile, that which a scrupulous Jew would never do, to accept Gentiles uncircumcised into the church on the basis of their spiritual unity with the Jewish believers, and that is the sharing of the same baptism in the spirit.

And this was something Peter was not at all prepared to do, but you see, he did get it. He did get it there in Acts chapter 10, and he did come to understand it. Mark, of course, would have been written sometime after that.

And if it was the result of Peter's preaching, it may be interesting that Mark's gospel is the only gospel that specifies the meaning of Jesus' statement in the end, about it's not what goes into a man's mouth that defiles him, but what comes out of his mouth, because at the end of verse 19, for example, there is the statement, thus purifying all foods. Now, the New King James includes that statement within the quotation marks, as if Jesus said that, thus purifying all foods, and he may have. But there are others who feel like the quotation marks should come after the word eliminated, which is just before that clause.

In other words, the expression, thus purifying all foods, would not be part of the quotation from Jesus. It would be Mark's commentary on what Jesus said. Jesus would then have said, in verses 18 and 19, Are you thus without understanding also? Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not enter his heart, but his stomach, and is eliminated? And Mark, Peter's interpreter, says, thus purifying all foods.

That is, this statement of Jesus purified all foods. Now, purified means declared clean. It eliminated the category of unclean foods.

And whether this is the correct way of seeing it or not, I think it is, this verse, that this is

Mark's statement here. It is quite clear that Jesus' statement does eliminate any category of unclean foods, because if it's not what goes into a man's mouth that defiles him, and by the way, Jesus says it emphatically in verse 15, There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him. Now, that wasn't true according to the Pharisees.

The Pharisees thought if you ate pork or if you ate some other unclean food, you were defiled. Jesus said, no, there's nothing which, if you eat it, will really defile you morally, because it goes into the stomach and it's eliminated. There's nothing permanent about what you eat.

It's just passing through. But what comes out of your mouth, that is far more indicative of what is defiling, because that comes out of the heart, and true defilement is a matter of the heart. Jesus, again, is teaching, as he has in many cases, that the only issues that matter to God are the internal issues, the issues of the heart.

Now, let's look at the first part and the second part of this, because there are two separate issues here, but they're related. One is the idea of human traditions and religion. The other is the idea of externalism and ceremonialism in religion.

Now, I say those are two issues because not all ceremonialism is human tradition. There was God-ordained ceremonialism in the Old Testament. There is none in the New Testament, with the possible exception of baptism, which is a Christian ceremony, and some would add to that a communion.

Although the Bible no more commands the taking of communion, it is certainly something that was practiced by Jesus and the disciples, and we could, therefore, include that in the list. Okay, now, this whole situation arose because Jesus' disciples ate with unwashed hands. We're not told whether this was habitual for them or whether it was just an unusual breach of custom.

They were, after all, Jews, and we know that they were somewhat in their own hearts and consciences still bound to Jewish ideas to a great extent. I mean, we find Peter on the housetop in Joppa saying to Jesus, when the sheep with the animals come, he says, I've never eaten anything unclean. That conviction that Peter had even after Pentecost, if it existed before Pentecost as well, may have led the disciples usually to wash their hands and to avoid unclean things.

On the other hand, it's also possible that the disciples were a little bit lax about at least customs of the Pharisees, like washing. It is easy to imagine, at least for me it's easy to imagine, that a not-too-religious Jew, like Peter the fisherman before he came to Christ, might avoid unclean animals in eating, but might not be too scrupulous about all the hand-washing business. After all, to wash your hands as often as the Pharisees and the rabbis dictated would really be fairly impractical.

Every time you went outdoors and came back in, you'd have to wash your hands again. And it wasn't just a matter of washing them, it was a matter of washing them a certain way with certain clean water. You had to make sure the water was pure that you used.

I don't know whether they boiled it or what, or strained it, but they had to make sure that the water that was used for purification was pure water, and that it had to be poured in a certain fashion over the hands in a religious way. It's quite clear that the whole purpose of it had nothing to do with getting clean, but had to do with fulfilling a tradition. It says in verse 3 here that the Pharisees and all the Jews did not eat unless they washed their hands in a special way.

And from the Talmud it seems clear that that was true. They had a special ritual of washing, they had to pour the water from a certain position over the hand, and then redo it a different way. It was all very religious.

Now, to really observe that would require that a person did not involve himself very much in the ordinary business of living. It just was impractical. And it seems likely that although Peter and probably the other disciples had not stooped so low even before they followed Christ as to start eating pork and other things would be blatantly violations of the law of God, but they may well have been incautious about things like ritual washings and stuff, which, I mean, it would just be very impractical, very difficult for the ordinary person in an ordinary job to wash himself all those times and all those ways that were required.

Furthermore, Jesus would be setting the example for the disciples, and it's quite clear that Jesus paid no attention to these rituals of washing. So whether the disciples had had any conscience about washing before they met Jesus or not, they probably were following Jesus' example now, and I think we probably could say that this incident of the disciples eating without washing their hands was no exception. They probably generally didn't wash their hands when they ate.

Look over at Luke chapter 11. We'll see that this was true of Jesus, and what is true of Jesus probably became the practice of the disciples. In Luke chapter 11, verses 37 through 42, you'll recognize here in the latter verses a similarity with something we're quite familiar with.

And as he spoke, a certain Pharisee asked him to dine with him. So he went in and sat down to eat. And when the Pharisees saw it, he marveled that he had not first washed before dinner.

Now, all the Pharisees, of course, if there were others at the table, had done this whole ritual. Jesus just walked past the jars, just sat down at the table and started eating. You know, he didn't go through the ceremony.

There must have been a line at the washing jars of all the Pharisees waiting for their turn to do it. Jesus just walked to the front of the line and went to the table and caused the Pharisee to invite him to marvel that Jesus didn't first wash. But the Lord said to him, now you Pharisees make the outside of the cup and dish clean, but your inward part is full of greed and wickedness.

Now, this is very much like the statements in Mark chapter 7 that we're looking at. He says you wash outwardly, but inward, the inward parts are full of uncleanness. And that's what he said in Mark 7. You know, it's what comes out of man, comes out of the heart, out of his inward parts.

That's what defiles him. Foolish ones, did not he who made the outside make the inside also? In other words, is not the heart God's concern as much as the outward? Now, of course, we know from Jesus' teaching that the heart was more a concern to God than the outward body was. But he blames them for concerning themselves only with the outward and not with the inward, as if God has only concern and claim over the outward life and not over the heart.

God made your heart too. He has a claim over that as well. You may think that if you keep your body clean, because that is the Lord's, that you have fulfilled your obligation, though your heart is full of wickedness.

But your heart belongs to God too. Didn't he make that too? Verse 41, but rather give alms of such things as you have, then indeed all things are clean to you. Now, as I pointed out, I don't know in Mark chapter 7 whether it's Mark's comment or Jesus' comment that says thus purifying all foods.

I think it's Mark's comment, interpreting what Jesus said, that Jesus' words thus declared all foods to be purified or clean. But whether or not Mark is making that statement in Mark 7, we can see that Jesus makes essentially the same statement here. All things are clean to you.

And it's quite clear he's talking in the context of the meal, of dinner. All things are clean. Foods that you eat without washing your hands are clean.

In fact, all things, no matter what kinds of food they are, they're all clean. But on the condition that you give what you have as alms to the poor. Now, Jesus is not here giving a teaching about alms.

Nor is he even initiating a command about giving alms, although it's quite clear Jesus expected his disciples to give alms. He even commanded them to on other occasions. In Luke 12, for example, he told them to give alms.

And yet what he's saying here is if you give alms to the poor of what you have, that is, if you sacrificially give to those who have little, that is a greater evidence of personal

cleanness. That is, cleanness of heart. It's generosity.

It's charity. It's love. If you have love for your neighbor, demonstrated in such things as helping the poor and so forth, then everything you eat can be regarded as clean.

All things are clean to you if your heart is clean. Now, giving alms is not a legalistic thing that he's referring to here. He's talking about that as a reflection of generosity and heartfelt compassion and so forth.

If you have compassion for the poor, if you have love for your neighbor, well, that's what God's looking for. That's your heart is right then. If your heart is right, it doesn't matter what you eat.

It doesn't matter what the outward is. Look over at Titus, if you would. Chapter 1, beginning with verse 14.

Titus 1, 14 and following. Not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men who turn from the truth. Sounds like what Jesus said.

They keep their traditions and reject the... They keep the traditions of men and reject the commandments of God. So, we're not to be giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men who turn from the truth. To the pure, all things are pure.

But to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but even their mind and conscience is defiled. This sounds like Paul's commentary on the passage in Mark 7. That if your heart is pure, then everything you do outwardly is pure. It doesn't matter what you eat.

It doesn't matter what rituals you perform. Your life is pure if it's pure inside. You could say, just love and that'll be enough.

Everything else is alright. Now, the problem with saying that, of course, is the problem in identifying what constitutes love. Because in our society, if we say, just be a loving person and then do what you want.

I think it was Augustine that said this. Just love God and do what you will. But what he meant by that is that if you really love God in the right way, you'll want to do the things that please God.

You won't just say, well, now that I love God, I can go out and sin. If you love God, you won't want to sin. If you say, I love God so I can go out and sin, you don't love God.

Because if you love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, the thought of sinning is abhorrent to you. And therefore, to love God, love your neighbor, everything else is pure. If your heart is pure, if you have love for God and love for your neighbor in the measure that you are supposed to have, then all things are pure to you.

But to those whose hearts are defiled, and Jesus said it's what comes out of the heart, out of the mouth from the heart that defiles a man, nothing is pure, which suggests that even if they eat only clean foods, they're still impure. They may not defile themselves ceremonially, but they're impure because their heart is impure. And that's because their mind and their conscience are defiled, which is probably just another way of talking about what Jesus said, the heart.

It's the things that come out of the heart that defile a man. Well, the heart is metaphor. It's not talking about the blood puff below the fifth rib.

He's talking about your mind and your conscience. So Paul is really kind of unpacking and expanding on what Jesus said. And Jesus said it in a couple of places.

Once when the disciples were blamed for eating with unwashed hands, and once when he himself was accused of it. And he said to the Pharisee, just give alms and everything will be clean. Everything will be pure to you.

That is to say, not if you legalistically give alms, because Jesus was never into legalism, but rather give alms because almsgiving is a sign of compassion to the needy. Almsgiving is an evidence of love, if it is done out of love. Now, of course, Paul clarifies over in 1 Corinthians 13, he said, if I bestow all my goods to feed the poor and have not love, it profits me nothing.

It's hard to know exactly why a person would bestow all his goods to feed the poor and not have love, but it can be done religiously. It can be done for show. It is not unheard of for people to choose an ascetic and poverty-stricken lifestyle for the sake of getting honor from men who think that's a great thing to do.

And therefore, it is possible to even give alms and have it not profit you. You can give alms and still be defiled in your heart and your motives. So, Paul even clarifies beyond what Jesus said.

Jesus said, if you give alms, all things are clean to you. And Paul said, but even if you give alms, if it's not from love, it profits nothing. Nothing is clean to you, then you have to give alms out of love.

But the whole counsel of the Scripture, especially the New Testament, clarifies that the ceremonies and outward things of cleanliness are not at all at issue. What is at issue is your heart. If you love God, if you have compassion for your neighbor, if you do unto others as you'd have them do to you, you don't even have to concern yourself with ceremonial things like washings and diet and so forth.

Or we might add some man-made traditions of the church as well. Now, one thing we need to see here is that this is not included, this teaching and this story is not included just so that we know something about hand washing. Because three times in the story of

Mark, there is reference to many other such things.

Hand washing is one thing, but there are many other things in the same category that are all to be considered under the same teaching. For example, in verse 4, Mark is familiarizing his Gentile audience with the customs of the Jews. By the way, Matthew wrote to a Jewish audience and he doesn't explain these things.

The verses in verses 3 through 4, which explain the Jewish customs, are not found in Matthew. Matthew doesn't bother to give this explanation because his readers are Jewish. They know the Jewish customs.

Mark is writing probably to Romans who are not Jewish and therefore they need to be told what's the deal here. Why were the disciples criticized for eating with unwashed hands? So he clarifies, well, the Pharisees are kind of into hand washing. And not only that, they wash their cups and their tables and their couches and their pitchers and everything.

And in verse 4 he says, when they come into the marketplace, they don't eat unless they wash. And there are many other things which they have received and hold. Like, then he talks about other things they wash.

Also, the reference to many other things is in verse 8. Jesus said, for laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men, washing of pitchers and cups and many other such things you do. And then in verse 13 he says, making the word of God of no effect through your tradition, which you have handed down and many such things you do. So three times there's reference to many such things or many other things.

One of the many other things, statements is found in Mark's commentary in verse 4. The other two are from Jesus' own lips. He says, I'm criticizing you on this point, but there's a lot of other points in the same category. Similar, many other such things of the same type you are guilty of.

So Jesus is giving a generic teaching. He's using the occasion of hand washing as a sample of what could be many other things like it in the same general category as an occasion to talk about ceremonies and traditions in general. Now let's go through the passage.

The story picks up after verse 2. In verse 5, you know, there's that explanation, parenthetical explanation, verses 3 and 4. Then verse 5, Mark 7 says, then the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands? Now tradition of the elders, the word elders there refers to the rabbis of older times. The rabbis who had come up with all these customs. These Pharisees didn't make them up.

I mean, this generation of Pharisees didn't. Earlier generations of rabbis had come up

with them. In fact, the Pharisees taught that these traditions actually, although they were given by the elders, had been passed down from Moses.

They actually had lost track. If you read the Talmud today, they do not make a distinction between the laws that God gave to Moses and the traditions of the elders because they believe that the traditions of the elders actually do go back to Moses, although they were not written into the Decalogue or into the Pentateuch. So they simply didn't know the difference between the commandments of men and the commandments of God, which is a very dangerous thing.

By the way, that is perhaps one of the principal defects of legalism. Now, the word legalism is not found in the Bible, which leads to a certain danger or risk in using that term because many persons will call other persons legalists. But since the word is not a biblical word, it raises questions as to what does the word mean.

When can one be called a legalist and when does such a term, when is it derogatory? Well, quite obviously, legalist is always a derogatory term. Legalist, whatever it may be defined as by the person using it, is always meant as a derogatory term. It always means putting too much emphasis on law.

Legalist, obviously, is someone who is into law. However, the term has been used a variety of ways. In fact, you could be called a legalist by some if you simply said people ought to obey Jesus.

You tell some people they should obey Jesus and they'll call you a legalist. You tell some people that they should stop getting drunk on weekends and stop sleeping with their girlfriend, they'll call you a legalist. Others, unfortunately that's an extreme case that is not universal in the evangelical churches, but there are others who would say legalism is putting any emphasis on works or looking to works for righteousness.

I think probably the most common way that people mean the word when they use the word legalism is the practice of looking to your works, any kind of works, as a means of justification. That you are justified by faith alone and if you are depending in any sense on your works to add to your salvation, to add to your justification, that this is what I think most evangelicals would call legalism. Some would be more specific and say, well, religious laws like the law of Moses.

Now, frankly, I think if we were to apply legalism to anything that was found in the epistles, we would think first of all of the epistle to the Galatians. I think that almost everybody when thinking about how legalism is wrong and where the Bible says legalism is wrong thinks of Galatians and maybe Romans, possibly a few verses in Ephesians and Colossians as well. But Galatians stands out because that was the issue.

The issue was legalism. But the legalism of Galatians was a little different than the

legalism of the Pharisees here. In Galatians, it was a problem of teaching that the law of Moses needed to be, obedience to the law of Moses needed to be added to faith as a condition for justification.

We know that in Galatians, Paul was arguing that you don't have to be circumcised. You don't have to keep the law of Moses. If you have faith, that's enough and you don't need the law of Moses.

Now, that's a very different thing than what Jesus is talking about here. He's certainly criticizing the legalism of the Pharisees. But the legalism that Paul is concerned with was the legalism of Judaizers.

These were people who were trying to add Jewish practices to Christian practices. There was Christianity on the one hand, and there was then the practices of Judaism, which were legitimate. Circumcision, dietary laws, offering of sacrifices.

These things were observed by certain Christian Jews in Jerusalem, and some of them thought they should be practiced by the Gentile Christians as well. And Paul's point against that kind of legalism was that the law of Moses, though it was valid at one time, is not valid under the new covenant for the New Testament believer. Now, that's not the point Jesus is making.

Jesus is not saying the law of Moses is wrong.